

Food Plots

Job Sheet

PURPOSE: Food plots are used to provide a wide variety of foods for a host of wildlife species. Typically they are planted to an annual agricultural crop, such as corn or milo, to provide a high energy source of food for wildlife in the winter. Interest in other types of plants for food plots, such as ladino clover for green browse or forage sorghum for escape cover and food, has increased in recent years. Although food is seldom the primary limiting habitat component for wildlife in Missouri, the use of food plots can provide important food and cover plants—both planted and natural—resulting in an increased abundance and diversity of foods available to a wide range of wildlife species. Grain food plots also create important brooding/bareground habitat.



Soybean Field next to Fallow Food Plot



Corn Field Plot with Annual Forbs in Winter

SPECIFICATIONS: Food plots come in two main types: grain food plots designed to provide seed, and green browse food plots which offer succulent vegetation for wildlife forage. In some instances, the two can be combined.

For grain food plots, planting should be done early enough to allow adequate time for the crop to produce mature seed. In general, grain plots should be a minimum of 0.25 acres in size, at least 30 feet in width, and located adjacent to good woody escape cover and diverse herbaceous cover. Establish plots so that soil loss is within tolerable limits, and planting on the contour is recommended. Food plots should be adequately fertilized and protected from livestock grazing. In most cases weed control should be limited, as the 'natural foods' provided by annual weedy plants are important to many wildlife species. In general, one plot per 40 acres of farmland is a minimum. Seeds produced on small plots are often exhausted by wildlife early in the winter; where possible consider increasing the plot size to one to two acres to provide longer-term benefits. In general, plots larger than four acres in size are unneeded. Establishing a rotation where half of the grain food plots are left fallow each year to provide annual forbs provides additional benefits.

Green browse food plots should be located adjacent to quality wildlife cover, and a minimum of one acre in size. The use of correct amounts of nutrients and maintaining desirable pH levels is important to ensure quality. Properly timed mowing can help to promote actively growing vegetation, especially for perennial plantings, and increase its attractiveness to wildlife. Mowing July 15 - September 30 is desired. Plots can also be mowed Mid-April - May 1. It is recommended that only one-half of the plot be mowed annually, and that mowed strips are rotated, to increase plant diversity. Care should be taken in not planting aggressive non-native legume species.

Grain mixtures:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Grain Sorghum – 8#/acre
Soybeans ----- 12#/acre | 2. Grain Sorghum – 8#/acre
Soybeans ----- 8#/acre
German millet ----2#/acre | 3. Grain Sorghum – 12#/acre
Sunflowers ----- 8#/acre |
|---|---|---|
- 4.* Grain Sorghum – 8#/acre *this mixture is best used if planted in separate rows, e.g. two rows of
Corn ----- 8#/acre corn and two rows of grain sorghum.

Green Browse mixtures:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Wheat ----- 30#/acre
Orchardgrass --- 2#/acre
Ladino clover ---2#/acre
Red Clover----- 2#/acre | 2. Wheat -----30#/acre
Alfalfa -----5#/acre
Red Clover---2#/acre |
|--|--|

Note: Wheat should be planted in the fall (September through October 15). Lespedeza can be substituted for the ladino and red clover in mixture 1. Lespedeza should be planted in the spring.

Other mixtures and species may be used based on recommendations provided by a professional wildlife biologist or the Natural Resources Conservation Service. In some cases, simply disking may be sufficient to provide adequate natural foods. Note that there are specific program requirements for establishing food plots on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres.

MAINTENANCE:

- ☐ Exclude livestock from plantings.
- ☐ Leave half of grain plots fallow each year to provide natural foods.
- ☐ Use proper fertilization to provide optimum benefits.

PRIMARY HABITAT CONSIDERATIONS:

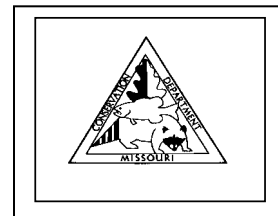
- Provide food sources for targeted wildlife species. Food source can be seed, forage, or insects.

Consult with NRCS or MDC wildlife biologists and private land conservationists, or University Extension for additional recommendations.

Landowner: _____ Farm No. _____ Tract No. _____

Field No. _____

CONTACT:



Date: _____

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